

27th Sunday After Pentecost, 2008 (Proper 28A)

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Title: Trust

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Trust is difficult to come by. It takes time for someone to earn your trust, and once that trust is broken, it's nearly impossible to get it back.

Who can you trust these days? Do you trust your doctor? Do you trust the politicians you just elected? Do you trust your mechanic? Do you trust your coworkers? Do you trust your neighbors? Do you trust your pastor? Do you trust children? Do you trust your parents? Do you trust your husband or wife?

Without trust, relationships fall apart. Without trust families fall apart. Without trust congregations fall apart. When we don't trust other people, then we become selfish, and we place everything on our own shoulders, instead of relying on those around us. We try to do everything ourselves, and often fail.

Think about a military unit. Everyone in the unit from the private through the general has to trust one another. If anyone second-guesses his orders, or doesn't trust another to carry out their orders, then the whole unit will fall apart.

Think about a team. It's football season. In football, the quarterback trusts his line to protect him, he trusts the coaches' decisions, and he trusts his receivers to run the correct routes. If the team doesn't trust one another, they are bound to loose.

Today's parable is all about trust.

It begins with a wealthy man who's about to go away on a trip. Before he leaves, he entrusts huge sums of money to three of his servants. In today's terms, a talent is worth several hundred thousand dollars. And he gives five talents to one, two to another, and one to the last.

What's amazing is that the master trusts his servants. He trusts them each with a small fortune. He's not afraid that they'll waste it, or spend it on parties. He gives them the money and leaves, and he gives them very little instruction.

How many of you have left on vacation, and left your kids home alone? If so, I'm sure you gave them very clear instructions- how to care for the house when you're gone- water the plants, bring in the mail, all of those things. What to do in case of emergencies. You probably left pretty clear instructions, too, about whether or not they could have friends over, and, of course, no parties.

What if you left, and not for a weekend, but for at least a few months, and not only did you leave your kids in charge of the house, but your money, too. Would you trust them with your credit card? With your check book? With access to all your money, including your retirement accounts? Could you do this? Could you trust your kids with this responsibility?

Well, the master in today's story did just that. He divided his property between three of his slaves. He trusted them to use these resources wisely. And then he left. And notice what the slaves did. Two of them put the money to work. In this case it probably meant buying a business or some property, something that would be profitable. They were not thinking about themselves. They were not afraid of the consequences if the businesses failed. They took risks.

When someone trusts you, and entrusts something of value to you, that really can boost your self-esteem. The fact that their master had trusted them with such great wealth surely emboldened these slaves so that they did their best and worked their hardest so as not to disappoint their master. They wanted to earn the trust that their master had shown to them. They wanted to prove to him that he had made the right choice in trusting them.

But the third slave was different. He was afraid. He was afraid that he would lose his master's money, that whatever he would do would fail, and then the master would be angry with him. Fear is the opposite of trust. All fear is self-regarding. All fear is just looking out for yourself.

And so he does nothing. He buries the money, because he's afraid what might happen if he loses it. He doesn't trust his master. He doesn't think that the master made the right choice by giving him the money. He doesn't think that he has the right skills to manage it properly. And so he just gives up. He doesn't try.

When the master finally returns, he settles his accounts with his slaves. For the first two, the time has been profitable. The investments have doubled.

Listen carefully to how they explain this success, "You entrusted me with five talents"... "You entrusted me with two talents." They begin by talking about their master and what he has given them, the fact that he has trusted them. They don't talk about their business skills. They don't talk about details of what they used the money for. They simply state that the master has trusted them and that this trust has paid off.

And listen to the master's reaction. "Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful..." The master praises the faith of the servants. They have been trustworthy, they have been faithful.

This relationship between master and slave has been profitable for both, because they trusted one another. The master trusted the servants to act wisely. The servants trusted that their master had made the right choice in entrusting his money to them. The result is joy. The master is joyful, and he invites the slave to share in his joy.

When it comes time for the third slave, the scene is quite different. What does the slave talk about? He doesn't begin by talking about the master, as the other two had. He doesn't mention

the master's trust or generosity. Instead, he talks about himself and his perception of his master. "I know that you are a harsh man, I was afraid, so I hid your money."

The slave was afraid, so he played it safe. He figured, "If I don't risk the money, I can't lose it and I won't be punished." It's a sensible plan. But it's not the way of trust, it's the way of fear. And the master calls it what it is- laziness. A whole talent of silver is not a small sum of money. We're talking several hundred thousand dollars. And to just sit on it and do nothing is laziness. Laziness often comes from fear. We're afraid to fail and so we do nothing.

The master trusted the slave, but the slave did not trust the master and he did not trust himself and his own abilities.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there is a real danger for us, here at Faith Lutheran Church, to be this third slave.

We look around and see that we're a small congregation. We don't have the resources that some of the larger congregations in the area. We're tempted to think, let's just play it safe. Let's not take any risks. Let's just hold on to what we've got and try not to lose it.

We're tempted to think like that third slave, maybe the Lord's made some mistake. Certainly we're not good enough, we're not big enough, we're not rich enough, we're not young enough to be entrusted with the Lord's treasures.

We are in danger of giving in to fear- fears of growing old, fears of dying off and fears of closing our doors.

But that is not the way of faith. The Lord has entrusted us with a great treasure. We have been given the precious gift of his gospel message. We have been entrusted with the gospel and the sacraments- these life-giving gifts, more precious than any gold or silver.

We can keep it to ourselves, we can hide it away and play it safe, or we can let that gospel do its work out there in the world. The Lord has entrusted his gospel to you and to me. As we heard last week, we don't know when the Lord will return. We don't know when the end will come. When don't know when the master will come back to settle accounts.

And so we put his gifts to work here in this place. We use all of our resources to put this gospel to work here.

You are members here in this congregation, and by choosing to be a member of this congregation, you are saying that this is the place where you will receive God's free gifts. This is the place where your gifts will be put to work. This is the place where the Lord will use you in His service.

Our congregation is not an end in itself. This congregation does not exist simply as a place to socialize- to make friends and to have a good time. It's much more than that. This congregation is a place where the Lord saves sinners, this is the place where heaven comes down to earth, this

is the place where the Lord speaks to you and gives you his very body and blood. This is the place where those gifts are used in the Lord's service. This is a place to learn and to grow, to serve those in need- bringing them both the gifts of life and salvation, but also clothing and food, encouragement and support. This is a place to pray, praise and give thanks.

Our neighborhoods and our own families are filled with people who need to know that someone loves them, that someone forgives them, that there's something better than this falling apart world.

We, too, need to hear again every week that we belong to the Lord, that He has given His life for us, and that heaven's joys await all of his good and faithful servants.

For all of that to happen here, for the Lord's work to go on at this place, we need to trust the Lord, and to trust one another.

Such trust is not something that we can come up with by ourselves. We are by nature distrustful. But it begins with the Lord trusting us. He has trusted us so much that he has given us the treasure of his gospel. He trusts us to put that gospel to work- to use everything we have been given to get the gospel message out- not to hide it out of fear.

Since the Lord has trusted us, we trust him by giving him our time and money, by taking risks, by not thinking about ourselves and not giving in to fear. And we too will one day hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share in your Master's joy."